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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [CD](#) [SU](#) [SCRS](#)
SUBJECT: FOLLOW-UP MEETING WITH NRF REBEL LEADERS

REF: A. NDJAMENA 70 B. KHARTOUM 80 C. KHARTOUM 93

Classified By: S/CRS Charles Wintermeyer for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has not yet been able to convince other members of the National Redemption Front (NRF) to issue a statement renouncing any intentions of seeking to overthrow the regime in Khartoum, JEM's political representatives told the Ambassador January ¶30. Meeting with us for the first time since Special Envoy (SE) Natsios met with rebel leaders in Abeche on January 19 (Ref A), Tadjadine Bechin Niam and Ahmed Tugoud Lissan also expressed concern that a conference of military commanders of the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) could hinder efforts to agree on a united political front. They continue to maintain that the Darfur Peace Agreement cannot serve as a basis for future negotiations on power-sharing and security arrangements. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The JEM representatives met with the Ambassador and Emboffs January 30 in N'Djamena. Niam, NRF Secretary for Reconstruction and Development, and also its representative to the AU, was instrumental in organizing the 19 January meeting between SE Natsios and the Sudanese rebels held in Abeche, Chad. Togoud is Secretary for External Affairs and chief negotiator. They were accompanied by Mohammed Shariff, head of their Cairo office. They noted they were meeting with the Ambassador as political representatives, not in their other capacity as field commanders.

¶3. (U) The team reiterated their appreciation for the meeting with SE Natsios. They were pleased that SE Natsios was willing to come to their area, to Abeche in eastern Chad, and that he devoted so much time to the meeting. They said they understood SE Natsios' key points and his new ideas and were studying them.

No Formal Renunciation of Regime Change Yet

¶4. (C) Responding to SE Nasios appeal to the NRF in Abeche January 19 to rnounce regime change as a political goal, the NRFrepresentatives said the JEM members of the NRF ha agreed among themselves that evening to issue sch a public statement. When they raised the ide with their other NRF counterparts the next mornng, they pointed out that their SLM "friends" woud object. According to Niam and Togoud, some SLM members feared that such a statement would put the Sudanese government in a better position. For its part, JEM sees no problems with such a statement because they do not seek regime change as long as they can obtain their goals peacefully. The JEM representatives left open the possibility of an announcement by JEM Chairman Khalil Ibrahim in an interview or press article that JEM does not seek regime change. Niam said other NRF members are not aware

that JEM is considering this option. JEM wants to "drive slowly" so that other NRF members do not feel pressured and will instead be more willing to reach a consensus.

Concerns about a Commanders' Conference

15. (C) Pressed for their views on the various proposals to hold commanders' conferences, the JEM representatives expressed concern that an SLM gathering would fragment the SLM even more. They feared it could have the unfortunate result of isolating the military commanders from their political leadership. Such key military leaders as Abdala Barda and Adam Bakhit were not intending to participate. In their view, the NRF should provide the framework for any conference in the interest of ensuring cohesiveness and unity.

Disdain for the DPA

16. (C) In response to the Ambassador's points about the DPA as the basis for future negotiations, Niam and Togoud claimed the DPA had been overwhelmingly rejected by the people of Darfur and it was a "dead agreement." They agreed that the DPA's provisions on wealth-sharing are broadly acceptable and acknowledged that some NRF members believe the negotiations could start from the DPA's Declaration of Principles. Niam and Togoud nevertheless saw no point in trying to work from the DPA on the issues of power-sharing and security arrangements. Accommodating their concerns in these areas, they believed, would mean a new agreement. The Ambassador

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pointed out some of the DPA terms were consistent with NRF stated goals, and advised them not to get hung up on semantics. They responded that they were willing to compromise, but that the DPA, except for the Declaration of Principles, was not acceptable.

Darfur and the South

17. (C) The JEM representatives observed that they had learned a lesson from the Abuja negotiation process, and that they should have had a more unified position with the South. They said that they had had discussions with southern leaders in 2005 about forging a common negotiating position. They claimed that Darfur indirectly saved the CPA between the North and the South by diverting so much of the GoS's resources and attention. On the other hand, they understood concerns by southern leaders that the DPA could undermine the stronger role the CPA had enabled southern Sudan to achieve in Khartoum. Still, the JEM representatives argued, Darfur and the South would be in a stronger position if they could come together politically. With Darfur representing 20 percent of Sudan's population and the South 18 percent, the government in Khartoum fears that the two regions together could win national elections.

Time Is Not On Our Side

18. (C) The JEM representatives agreed with SE Natsios' point that time was not on the rebel's side because of Khartoum's growing economic strength, but added other reasons why this is of concern to them. They expect that the South will vote for independence in 2011, and that afterwards Darfur would again be marginalized by Khartoum for another fifty years. They believed that even if there is a new Darfur peace agreement in the next few months, the Sudanese government would delay signing it until the end of the year.

Then, elections would be called without sufficient time for them to be properly managed, and the GOS would win them.

AU Presidency

¶9. (C) The members had mixed feelings about Sudan President Bashir not becoming the next President of the African Union (AU). While they despise him personally, they felt it was a national humiliation for Sudan. They understood Bashir had wanted to withdraw Sudan from the AU if he was rejected for its presidency, but changed his mind when reminded that this would lead to the AU pulling out of Darfur and being replaced by UN troops.

Comment

¶10. (C) While the NRF genuinely appreciated SE Natsios' meeting with them and the other rebel groups, their positions have not materially changed. Notwithstanding Minni Minawi's assertion that the NRF is now defunct (Refs B and C), these two are proceeding with efforts to consolidate the NRF as an umbrella group for future negotiations.
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